

READING GROUP GUIDE
for
AN ACCIDENTAL MOTHER
By Katherine Anne Kindred

ABOUT THE BOOK:

This is the story of Kate and Michael. He was a sweet young boy, neglected by his birth mother and now living with his dad.

Michael's father, Kate's boyfriend, allowed Kate to become Michael's mother—to care for him and help raise him and to blossom in her unexpected new role. But when they split up after six years, despite his early assurances to the contrary, the father refused Kate access to the child. She had no rights. She was devastated.

And she always will be.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Katherine Anne Kindred has been previously published in the literary journal *Memoir (and)*. She lives in Phoenix with her dog, Sophie. This is her first book.



AUTHOR INTERVIEW:

1. Why did you write this book?

The book wrote itself over a period of six years, but it wasn't until I was denied contact with Michael that I decided to put all of the stories together for him. I hoped that someday I would see him again, and I could give him this record of our time together, our bond, the love I felt for him. More than anything I wanted to find a way to let Michael know I did not intentionally abandon him, and that I love him as much as any mother could love a child. It was only after I put the stories together that I thought maybe I had a publishable manuscript. Then I realized if I could get it published, it would be out in the universe for Michael to find, even if he couldn't find me.

2. Was writing the book hard? Was writing the book a healing process?

The majority of the book was easy to write – the humorous stories, my observations on parenting, the antics of the children. But during the final chapters the tears flowed often and freely – and of course I had my moments of anger and frustration. But once it was put together as a whole, I realized that this book was an affirmation of my role as a mother in Michael's life, and that brought me great comfort.

3. What's next for you?

I am working on a story entitled "No Crying in the Garage." We often camped with friends in the Imperial Sand dunes, spending most of our weekends riding around in the dunes in our sand rails. After our break-up, I was determined to get the motor home, the trailer and my own sand rail back to the dunes and manage the entire operation by myself - pulling it off was quite empowering. However, the challenges I faced in the weeks preparing for that first trip turned out to be far more than I bargained for, and that is where my story begins.

4. Do you hope this book sparks discussion about parental rights or is that of no relevance to you – this is just a personal story?

My biggest wish is that Michael will find the book so he will know I did not abandon him, know how much I love him. But with current divorce and remarriage rates, a high percentage of children are destined to be parented by multiple adults during the course of their childhood. It is my hope that this story will provoke discussion and analysis on the topic.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do you define "motherhood" or what and who mothers are?
2. How did the inclusion of Michael's pictures add to the telling of this story?
3. Do you think stories like Kate's could generate discussion about parental rights? About children's rights?
4. If you are a mother, what funny stories like Kate's are the ones you want to remember about your own children?
5. Whose story is this?
6. Is this a book about grief?
7. Kate says she wrote this memoir with the hope Michael will read it one day and know that she loves him and didn't abandon him. Do you think she will see him again?
8. Is this a memoir about family more than motherhood?
9. Do you think Kate's story is unusual, or increasingly common?
10. How was Kate's motherhood accidental, and how was it not?